DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 583 EC 303 216

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TITLE State Policy Issues in the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jun 94
NOTE 23p.; In: Ross, Patricia O' Connell, Ed. National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent. An Anthology of Readings; see EC 303 213.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Ability Identification; Accountability; Curriculum Development; Definitions; *Educational Change; Educational Legislation; Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Excellence in Education; Federal State Relationship; *Gifted; Governance; Instructional Development; Policy Formation; School Districts; School Restructuring; State Legislation; State School District Relationship; *Talent; Talent Identification
IDENTIFIERS *State Policy

ABSTRACT

This paper, commissioned for the development of the national report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent," examines current state policies, regulations, and legislation concerning education programs for gifted and talented students. The paper also looks at other state policies which have a direct influence on the nature and scope of local programs for gifted and talented students. Recent policies to restructure education are considered in the context of their effects on programs for gifted and talented students. Specific principles are recommended for shaping the reform agenda in the areas of curriculum and instruction, accountability, and governance. For each principle, examples of actions and potential impact on gifted and talented students are discussed. In addition, approaches taken by states to the following traditional issues are considered: (1) whether gifted and talented education policies should be linked with special education policies; (2) how the state should define and demarcate the gifted and talented population; (3) whether the state should mandate services for gifted and talented students; and (4) how the state can provide fiscal incentives to districts for gifted and talented education programs. The paper concludes with a checklist for states in policy development and recommendations for federal leadership. (DB)

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ED 372 583

State Policy Issues in the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

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Federal, state, and local leadership and fiscal support are needed to improve the education of gifted and talented students in the United States. Federal and state leadership needs to provide rewards and sanctions that encourage districts and schools to create caring learning environments where successful interactions can occur between teachers and gifted students. Leadership will require that standards be developed to define desired outcomes for gifted students and programs and to ensure that diversity in student populations and abilities is addressed. Successful education reform initiatives will require the development of new systems for identifying and serving gifted students and for funding programs. Reform will require a reassessment of traditional state policies regarding gifted education and a partnership between gifted education and regular education. It is critical that policy makers, educators, and the public understand that services for gifted and talented children are a need of these students and should not be used as a reward for accomplishment.

Introduction

A little more than two decades ago, Senator Jacob K. Javits sponsored a bill requiring U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland to evaluate the status of the nation's gifted and talented children. The Commissioner was further directed to provide Congress with recommendations specifying how other federal educational assistance programs could be more effectively used to meet the needs of this population. The resulting report, *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, was widely acclaimed as a landmark document in the education of the gifted and talented. The document triggered the Special Projects Act of Public Law 93-380 and eventually led to the creation of the Office of Gifted and Talented within the U.S. Office of Education.

For the next ten years, limited funds were provided to state and local education agencies for program development. States used the modest incentive grants ($25,000 to $100,000) to create statewide awareness of the needs of the gifted and talented. Those seed monies, in turn, led to the allocation of state funds to support further programming. In numerous states, the initiation of the state leadership role began with funds from either the *Special Projects Act* or subsequent legislation, *The Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act of 1978*.

Substantial support for gifted and talented students education began with the states and was clearly triggered by federal leadership through the special incentive grant programs. Then in response to *The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981*, federal funds for the education of the gifted and talented were merged with the funds of 29 other programs, effectively ending federal leadership in the area. The states, however, continued to expand their programs and budgets for the gifted throughout the 1980s. The legacy of that early program leadership and fiscal support has continued into the present and been energized by the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Tal-

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ented Students Education Program established in 1988 under Public Law 100-297, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Through the national Javits Program, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education is currently exploring issues for the next decade and the role of federal leadership in the education of gifted and talented children.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a clear perspective on state policies and policy making practices which may be of use in the creation of a new federal and state partnership in the provision of services for our nation's gifted and talented students.

Conceptual Approach to Mapping the Federal and State Role in Educating Gifted and Talented Students

In order to discuss the ideal parameters of a federal-state partnership for gifted and talented students, we must first determine the desired outcomes for such a partnership. Clearly, the overall goal for the partnership would be to improve the education of gifted and talented students, a goal which the federal and state players cannot, on their own, achieve. For all the power of policy and funding, The U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, state legislatures, state boards of education, and state education agencies cannot directly improve the education of a single student. Federal and state policy leaders can, however, strengthen the capacity of districts and schools to create a caring, learning environment where successful interactions can occur between teachers and gifted students. Federal and state leaders can create rewards and sanctions that strongly urge districts and schools to provide such an environment. Those incentives can raise the awareness of the general public and of local decision-makers to extend support beyond the limited coercion of federal and state policies. But the most important actors in meeting the needs of gifted and talented children are individual teachers and students.

To achieve the outcomes we desire for gifted and talented students, we must focus on what we would like to see happen at the student level, then determine what has to happen at each successive level above the student level so that students achieve the desired outcomes. This approach, called backward mapping by Richard Elmore, differs from the usual policy analysis which focuses on outlining ideal policies to be issued from the top of the pyramid, with the assumption that regulation and compliance- monitoring will ensure implementation throughout the system. Under a backward-mapping approach, education leaders should concern themselves with the following questions:

- What would we like for gifted and talented students to know and be able to do?
- What has to happen in the classroom and in communities to help students achieve our desired outcomes?
- What can the local school system do to increase the likelihood that classrooms and the community do what is needed to help students achieve our desired outcomes?
- What can the state legislature, the state board of education, and the state education agency do to increase the likelihood that local schools systems do the things that will, in turn, help classrooms and communities?
- What can the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education do to help states and local school systems successfully increase the capacity of classrooms and communities to help students achieve our desired outcomes?

The Goal for the Partnership: Supporting Schools Which Address Diversity in Ability

The principles of backward mapping can be useful in determining the ideal parameters of a new federal-state partnership for gifted and talented students. We should begin with the first step of the process defining the desired outcomes for gifted

and talented students. These outcomes must be flexible for the vast span of ability represented in the population of the gifted and talented. Yet, in spite of the variance, we need some common idea of what gifted and talented students should know and be able to do. At this time, the parameters of a federal-state partnership will have to be based on an backward mapping which starts with what we think needs to happen one step up in the system in classrooms and communities. Given what we know about gifted and talented students, we can sketch some outline of a vision of a school and community environment in which the needs of the gifted and talented students can be met.

In the schools we seek, all children, from the less able to the most highly able, experience challenging work which engages and instructs so that children learn to use their minds well. All children, from the less able to the most highly able, move along at their own pace. Each feels that the adults around them expect success and will watch them closely to ensure success. A rich curriculum provides a center for, not the boundaries of, instruction. Teachers assume that adaptations and extensions will be needed for all children, based on their learning style, rate, and level. Teachers have the capability and resources to provide these adaptations and extensions.

In the schools we seek, children whose learning abilities are markedly different receive the special attention of all educators, and are not the sole responsibility of special educators. Teachers and administrators with special expertise assist their colleagues in meeting the needs of diverse students. The classroom organization and instructional strategies are designed for diversity. When the diversity is extreme, the school faculty, with advice from specialists, are inventive with arrangements and programs which match community and school resources with unique strengths and needs. All of the faculty who work with any exceptional student can articulate that student's unique strengths and needs, and they can also describe how they are adapting and extending the curriculum based on those strengths and needs.

In the schools we seek, highly able students and less able students do not compete for resources. Achieving success for all students is not equated with achieving the same results. Faculty and administrators understand that the differences in abilities among students varies widely. They work to bring the community into the education of all children, but a special effort is made to draw the community toward children whose differences in ability require additional resources and support. Thus, the community sees education of the most and least able as a challenge to be met, not as a problem which syphons off resources.

All children need instruction which stretches their abilities, but those in the upper quartile in any ability area must be challenged to go well beyond age level norms. Gifted students (upper 5 percent) will differ in abilities from the typical upper quartile student. The top .05 percent, or the highly gifted, are different from the typical gifted student. In the schools we seek, there is a continuum of instructional adaptations and extensions because the faculty acknowledge that intensity of need increases as student's abilities hit at higher points on the continuum. In short, the school stretches to meet the highly able at their level. It does not pull them back to a preset level based on age or normative standards.

In the schools we seek, unusual intellectual abilities are not seen by students or teachers as being an embarrassment or a liability. By developing the potential of the most able, the school encourages all students to recognize the value of achievement. By celebrating the intellectual accomplishments of all, including the highly able, the school models its rhetoric of academic excellence.

There are elements of the schools we seek in schools that exist today. Schools reaching for the goals of the restructuring movement are providing a glimpse of what schools can become. For the first time in decades, we can hope to create schools which will truly address the full range of students' abilities without a dizzying array of segregated,

special services. The opportunity exists but the reality eludes us yet. Thus the goal of the federal-state partnership for the gifted and talented must be to shape fundamental reforms at all levels of the system.

Shaping the Reform Agenda in Education

In September 1990, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement sponsored a conference for state directors of programs for the gifted. At the two-day meeting, state directors examined the major education reforms being discussed at the local, state and national level. These reforms tend to cluster into three areas: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and governance. The actions being taken under the three major areas were organized according to reform principles generally cited by policy makers and educators as a rationale for their reform actions. The action areas then formed the basis for discussion among the state directors who were encouraged to articulate the implications of the form actions for high ability students; ways the reform actions at the local level can be shaped to ensure that the needs of high-ability students are met; state leadership initiatives needed to help local districts; and OERI leadership needed to help states. The following sections outline the potential impact of reform actions on high ability students and the challenges for educators.

Area 1: Reforms Focusing on Curriculum and Instruction

Reform Principle A: The goal of schools is to help students to use their minds well—to master in-depth subject matter versus acquiring discrete bits of knowledge.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Reducing the emphasis on sports.
- Requiring students to meet academic standards to participate in extracurricular activities.
- Creating curricular frameworks that go beyond basic skills for all students.
- Increasing the emphasis on the importance of developing higher order thinking skills in all students.
- Expanding interdisciplinary instruction.
- Shifting the nature and content of student assessment measures.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Teaching higher order thinking skills as part of all subjects will make general education more appropriate for gifted and talented students. When all parts of the curriculum and instruction provide mind-stretching work for all students, the discrepancy between what gifted students need and the general program will be reduced. Since most gifted and talented programs provide special instruction only a fraction of the school week, it is essential that general curriculum and instruction be more engaging to the high-ability learner.

Another benefit of the emphasis on higher order thinking skills and inter-disciplinary instruction will be the additional research and teaching materials produced. This will improve the resources educators have for adapting the curriculum and instruction for gifted and talented students.

Negative Impact. For many years, advocates for the gifted and talented were able to push for special programs that would offer higher order thinking skills because such skills were not systematically developed in the regular classroom. As general education shifts its goals from basic skills to developing the thinking abilities of all students, the rationale for gifted and talented education programs will have to change. This will create an "identity crisis" for some gifted programs.

Gifted and talented students may also be hurt if educators falsely assume that providing some at-

tention to higher order thinking skills in all subjects will "take care" of the special needs of gifted students. Given our history for seeking simple solutions to complex problems, one can easily envision some possible negative consequences for the gifted in the current attempts to develop thinking skills through the regular curriculum. Textbook publishers, anxious to meet state curricular standards for thinking skills, have added new questions to the unit quizzes and labeled the questions, "Thinking Skills." Educators who believe that students can develop their thinking abilities by answering some additional textbook questions may also believe that gifted students will no longer need special programs if thinking skills are addressed by the textbooks.

Challenges. Educators, both in general education and in gifted and talented education, need to ensure that curricular frameworks being developed facilitate greater depth and breadth of study for the gifted learner. Many educators of the gifted and talented have extensive experience in instructional techniques that help students learn to use their minds well. General education should tap the talent that exists among specialists in gifted education to help all teachers develop or improve their capabilities to develop students' higher order thinking skills. General education will also benefit from the lessons learned in gifted education regarding effective and ineffective ways to help students develop critical and creative thinking abilities.

In restructuring the traditional curriculum, general educators and gifted and talented educators must take care not to devise another rigid system. Policies which detail competencies to be acquired by certain age levels are almost always implemented too literally and in a highly fragmented fashion. Higher order thinking skills should not be considered a subject. Learning to use one's mind well is not accomplished through the completion of a sequential checklist of competencies. Our current "inch deep and mile wide curriculum of factlets" does not serve any student well. Gifted and talented students, particularly with their exceptional learning abilities, must have the opportunity for continuous progress through rich curriculum which stresses connections and applications.

Reform Principle B: Students should be the workers in a school; teachers should be coaches who provoke students to learn how to learn.

Examples of Actions Being Taken

- Emphasizing student centered instructional techniques.
- Encouraging cooperative learning groups.
- Emphasizing more sophisticated questioning techniques for teachers.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Changing the role of students in schools from being seen as "products" to becoming the workers should lead to education which helps all children stretch their abilities. A challenging learning environment will provide opportunities for potential ability to emerge and demonstrated achievement to shine. Gifted and talented students will not have to hold back or hide their intellectual interests, because the norm of the schools will encourage achievement. As with higher order thinking skills, specialists in gifted and talented education have experience in student-centered instructional techniques, including posing questions. Their expertise should be tapped by general educators to help spread the use of these techniques for all students.

Many gifted and talented students prefer learning through inquiry and other approaches which capitalize on their proclivity for independence. Use of student-centered instruction and sophisticated questioning will make the general education program more appropriate for the gifted and talented.

Negative Impact. Gifted education was created and expanded because of the inability of general education to adapt its curriculum and instruction for students in the upper ends of the learning curve.

Once general education perceives it is doing a reasonable job in teaching higher order thinking skills and in fostering independent study among all students, they are likely to question the need for gifted programs and will want the special funds for the programs to be "returned" to general education.

Educators of the gifted may not be ready to defend the need for special programs as shifts occur in general education. Too many gifted programs have been sold as providing "special subjects" not covered in the general curriculum. The rationale for gifted education programs must be that exceptional ability requires extensions and adaptations of the usual curriculum and instruction based on the needs of individual students.

Not all teachers have sufficient knowledge, skills or abilities to effectively structure cooperative learning situations. Cooperative learning strategies in the hands of an unskilled teacher can be highly detrimental to gifted and talented students. At best, their pace and level of work can be inappropriately restricted. The potential for exploitation of the most able student exists when they are placed in poorly structured cooperative task groups. They may either insist on or be pressured into doing all the work of the group. They may be drafted into serving as "assistant teachers" for their classmates. Highly able students should be workers, but not the only workers among a group of students.

Challenges. As all teachers are trained in more effective instructional strategies, they will need to develop a greater understanding of the needs of gifted and talented students and a commitment to addressing those needs. They cannot assume that new instructional strategies will automatically "take care of" gifted students.

Reform Principle C: Schools should be structured to create a caring learning environment that focuses on attaining the curricular goal of helping all students to use their minds well. Instruction should be personalized to meet the needs of every group of students and paced according to individual student needs.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Increasing support for the "Middle Schools Movement."
- Organizing ungraded primary schools.
- Reorganizing school structures to create "houses", "families", "wings" or similar clusters of students and teachers.
- Expanding "individualized education plans" to more students.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Individualizing instruction will be highly beneficial to students with exceptional abilities, such as the gifted and talented. Once general education completely shifts from the current assembly-line model to an individualized, student-centered approach, the diverse needs of children will be addressed in all classrooms. Then gifted and talented education programs will be able to shift to a support role for general educators, with direct student services reserved for special cases.

Gifted and talented students have experienced alienation in schools. They will benefit from schools committed to being caring, learning environments for all students, including the exceptional.

Negative Impact. Individualized instruction is an ideal which is often discussed and infrequently practiced. The education system may not have the financial commitment to translate their rhetoric for individualized instruction into the time and training required. Most teachers will need training in student assessment and in utilizing an eclectic mix of instructional strategies. Individualized versus large group instruction will also require a reduced ratio of students to teachers and more planning time.

As with other reforms outlined above, there is a danger that schools will make some adjustments in the general education program and prematurely determine that they no longer need gifted and

talented programs. Or, general education may decide that the funds used for gifted and talented programs would be better spent trying to individualize instruction for all students, so that they will no longer need special gifted programs.

Creating caring, learning environments for all students means that the school must care about the bright students, as well as the slower students. Ingrained, dysfunctional school norms which promote anti-intellectualism and pressure students toward uniformity must be reversed. Restructuring schools to create close-knit communities, without making deliberate changes in school norms will only strengthen the effects of those norms on students. If this concern is not addressed, creating "nurturing" groups within schools will not meet the needs of the gifted. If those new groups are seen as replacements for programs which bring gifted students together for part of their school week, then gifted students will lose one of the few opportunities they have to spend time with people who accept their differences.

Challenges. Policymakers and educators have demonstrated narrow-minded thinking for decades. The "idea of the month" mentality, coupled with a strong tendency toward over-reaction, has created an endless series of discrete programs touted as systemic change. An educational system that works for all students will have to cease its tradition of trading-off resources where the needs of one group of students, high or low ability, are met at the expense of other students.

Parents and educators of gifted and talented children will have to change advocacy strategies. Their focus should remain on the gifted child, but their vision for what must change should be on all aspects of the gifted child's education. They must promote systemic changes in schools that will ensure that the needs of all students are met, including the extraordinarily gifted, the gifted, and the highly able.

Reform Principle D: All students, including those from racial, ethnic or socio-economic groups which have traditionally been less successful in schools, can and will learn to use their minds well.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Grouping students with heterogeneous abilities.
- Questioning "general education" track in high school and the quality of academic instruction in vocational education programs.
- Recruiting minority teachers.
- Using newer technologies, video discs and microcomputers, to provide the stimulation, patience and persistence needed to help learning-impaired and at-risk students, as well as to provide opportunities for "self-paced learning" needed by other students.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Gifted and talented students are also trapped in tracking systems. Teacher nominations and grades, two frequently utilized sources of information for identification techniques, yield both false "positives" and false "negatives". "Good students" who are not exceptionally able may be placed inappropriately in gifted programs. They find the pacing and level of work frustrating but may feel like failures if they are moved out of the program. Potentially gifted students missed in the identification process at one grade level may be permanently deemed to be "not gifted."

High ability and low ability students will benefit from the elimination of tracking whereby the learning capacity of children is appraised early in their school career and where then the results of that one-time appraisal guides instructional decisions for years. Greater flexibility for moving students in and out of gifted education programs will enable educators to focus their resources on services to students. Some districts expend the same, or more, resources to ensure that the right

students are selected as they do in providing special programs for the selected students.

Once the gifted label is not permanently affixed to students, educators will need to spend less time and energy on identification processes. Students' needs for some special assistance can be continuously appraised and services provided when they are needed, for as long as they are needed.

Negative Impact. Some schools have confused tracking and ability grouping and have eliminated any instructional grouping that places "like ability" students together. The misguided belief that heterogeneous grouping is best for all students has led some schools to eliminate a variety of advanced learning opportunities for more able students, including gifted programs. Other schools have decided that any adaptation for exceptional learners must take place in the regular classroom, but many have failed to provide teachers with the training, student load, or time they need to meet special learning needs.

Research has documented the benefits of grouping gifted students for instruction. The research findings on the negative effects of grouping low ability students should not be allowed to cancel out the positive effects of grouping gifted students.

Challenges. The same challenge in shaping the reforms outlined above exist for reforms that attempt to provide a challenging education for all students. The complexity and diversity of student needs must be understood by all educators. We cannot ignore one group, such as the gifted and talented, just because we have decided to turn our attention to another group. When policymakers and educators set a goal that all students will be successful, they must stick to their commitment to all students.

Reform Principle E: The key to a successful education system is talented personnel who have the knowledge, skills, and time to create and sustain effective schools.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Focusing on improving the quality of persons entering the profession by higher admission standards and/or tests to enter professional preparation programs; additional courses required in professional programs; tests to receive initial certification; beginning teacher support programs; beginning teacher evaluation; and higher starting salaries.
- Creating "Alternative Routes" to certification to get competent individuals into education without having to complete the usual professional preparation programs or fulfill all of the state standards for professional certification.
- Increasing incentives for teachers to achieve "mastery" status as professionals by setting standards for mastery (National Board for Professional Teacher Standards); creating different roles for master teachers (mentor teachers, career ladders); providing additional pay for achieving mastery; and increasing the quality of professional development opportunities.
- Increasing the number of contract days for teachers without increasing required contact days with students so teachers have more days for planning and professional development activities.
- Increasing the opportunities for teachers to learn from and support each other as professional colleagues through team-teaching, collegial coaching, and collegial decision-making groups within schools.
- Expanding the focus on qualifications of teachers "up the hierarchy" to others such as principals, superintendents, and staff in state education agencies.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Increasing the salaries, along with more rigorous standards for entry into the

profession, will raise the caliber of persons choosing teaching for a career. Alternative routes for earning a teacher certificate will enable talented persons to shift from other careers into teaching. Professional training opportunities which develop the skills of practicing teachers from the novice level through the proficient level will improve the quality of teaching. Gifted and talented students, like all other students, will greatly benefit from all of these efforts to improve teaching.

The movement away from the "egg crate" school where teachers were isolated in their classrooms will also benefit gifted students. As collegial sharing becomes the norm, gifted education specialists will find it easier to help general educators adapt and extend their instructional techniques to better serve the gifted. Similarly, general educators will be able to work with gifted education specialists in designing special services which are integrated with instruction in the regular classroom. Collegial sharing will also facilitate instructional planning across grades and subjects, so that the long-sought, "comprehensive, articulated services" could become a reality.

Negative Impact. Although certification and evaluation standards for teachers have been raised, there is no indication that the standards are designed to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by teachers to implement curriculum and instruction reforms aimed at developing the capacity of children to learn to use their minds well. Educators may talk about the need to focus on outcomes, but they still confuse means with ends. More preservice courses, entry tests, and observational evaluations of teachers will not ensure that teachers have the capabilities to assess student needs, learning styles, and levels, and to adapt the curriculum and their instructional techniques to ensure that all students are successful. Quality of teaching is the goal. Stricter certification requirements are just one of several strategies for achieving that goal.

The misplaced emphasis on raising certification requirements has also affected gifted education. The increased courses required for certification as a gifted education specialist may improve the knowledge of those earning the certificate, but it perpetuates the fragmentation that exists in education. Teachers see students as "your kids" and "my kids" and feel that "I'm not trained to do anything for those kids." The resulting problem is that no one is fully responsible for gifted students. Specialists are supposed to have the training to meet the needs of gifted students, but they only see the students for a few hours a week. Regular classroom teachers teach some or all of the basic subjects to their gifted students but are not expected to adapt fully or to extend the curriculum and instruction because they have not received special training.

Challenges. For at least fifteen years, leaders in gifted education have talked about the importance of training regular classroom teachers to help meet the special needs of gifted students. But the increased resources available for gifted education programs seems to have been expended primarily to train and hire more gifted education specialists. There is a growing movement to restructure education and pull the fragmented pieces back together into new paradigm of schooling. Leaders in gifted education need to advocate the shifting of some of the gifted education resources to the linking of general educators with specialists. These leaders also should strive to shape the new standards being set for general educators, especially the emerging indicators of proficient or expert teaching, to ensure that the definitions of mastery include ability to adapt instruction for the most able students.

Area 2: Reforms Focusing on Accountability

Reform Principle A: Policymakers, educators, parents and the public need to know how well schools are providing quality education to all their students and producing desired student outcomes.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Shifting to alternative forms of assessments, away from using paper and pencil and multiple-choice tests as the predominant way of evaluating student achievement.
- Shifting to performance assessments from norm- referenced assessments.
- Shifting to a broader group of indicators, away from using student achievement test results as the predominant measure of the performance of the education system.
- Increasing the reporting of performance of students, schools, and districts to policymakers, parents, and the public through such mechanisms as School and District "Profiles" or "Report Cards," and annual state reports on education given to legislatures.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Changes in student assessment provide a powerful lever to get schools to value and teach complex skills. The dethroning of norm-referenced, standardized tests as the measure of student achievement is likely to have a highly positive impact on gifted and talented students. Richer measures of complex cognitive abilities will be better for finding and gauging progress in gifted students. The shift in assessment will also trigger systemic change in curriculum and instruction throughout the general education program.

The emphasis on public reporting of student assessment information should help improve public awareness of and involvement in schools. In some districts, current "school profiles" or "report cards" are seen as public relations tools, and any information related to school problems or shortcomings is omitted. Hopefully, schools will begin to utilize their public reports as a tool to educate the public on the inadequacy of the current educational system, and the need for major changes to adapt to changes in our nation's work force and population. Public reports on schools should also move away from the numerical indicators which focus on describing the "average performer." The public needs to understand the diversity of student needs and learning styles and levels, while being convinced that success for all is in their best interest. If school profiles or report cards are used as tools to educate and not placate the public, then advocates for the gifted and talented will benefit. Public understanding of the diverse needs of students should engender a mood of support for the gifted and talented.

Negative Impact. Alternative assessment must remain fundamentally distinct from traditional assessment methods. The potential exists for any type of assessment to degenerate into norm-referenced, numerically-reported measures which do not serve students or educators well. For example, student portfolios permit a highly individualized evaluation with an "unlimited ceiling" in assessing student performance, which would make them ideal for gifted and talented students. Pioneer schools in alternative student assessment report that the greatest value of some of the new approaches is not the outcome, but the process itself. For example the process of a teacher and student selecting which pieces will be placed in a portfolio provide an rare opportunity for student self-evaluation and individualized teacher feedback. This type of activity would be very good for gifted students.

However, if portfolios are judged according to narrowly-focused criteria and the judgement reduced to whether or not a pre-set standard has been met, then the unique strengths of portfolios as an alternative assessment method will be lost. Then portfolios will offer only an illusion of true performance assessment. The exceptional work of a gifted student could go unnoticed because of a limited rating scale. Underachievement of some gifted students could be obscured by their portfolios. Their work could appear to a judge to be good compared to age peers although it would still be significantly below the capability of the students.

Challenges. Gifted and talented education leaders would be wise to invest heavily in influencing the development of alternative assessment methods. This reform area is still in the very early phases of development, but the potential for major changes is great for two reasons. First, policymakers are beginning to be very interested in alternative assessment. Second, using more complex and authentic measures of student performance will undoubtedly trigger a series of events that will ultimately transform schooling. Being present as the measures are developed and policies deliberated will enable gifted and talented educators to ensure that alternative assessment will also serve the needs of the most able students. This golden opportunity to bring gifted and talented students into the conscience of the entire education system should not be ignored.

Reform Principle B: The purpose of assessment should be to help improve education.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Changing student assessment measures to reflect growing community support for student mastery of complex skills and knowledge.
- Increasing acceptance of teacher assessment and school- site assessment as valid approaches to measuring student progress.
- Collecting and analyzing data by school site so that the data can inform school improvement efforts.
- Utilizing assessment data to reward high-performing schools or districts in order to create incentives for others to improve.
- Utilizing assessment data to target additional assistance and resources to low-performing schools or districts.
- Utilizing assessment data to apply sanctions to low performing schools or districts in order to create disincentives for low performance.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Developing the capacity of teachers and schools to assess the abilities (particularly the complex cognitive skills) of their students will be very beneficial to gifted students. As teachers gain experience in assessing complex skills, they will have a valuable tool to use in evaluating the effects of their teaching on students and in helping students evaluate their own performance.

If the criteria used to judge high-performing and low-performing schools includes appropriate indicators on the performance of gifted and talented students, then gifted education specialists may finally have their long-sought, magic wand that can impel all schools to address the needs of their most able students. The technical assistance and support given to low-performing schools should also benefit gifted and talented students trapped in ineffective schools.

Negative Impact. The accelerating interest in assessment and evaluation presents a major problem for gifted and talented education. Decisionmakers are posing tough questions and they want to see tangible results for their investment. Under the current system, the accepted measures of effectiveness have to do with effort expended and process completed.

Gifted education can satisfactorily answer traditional evaluation questions by citing increases in the number of students served, the number of districts or schools providing gifted programs, and other input indicators. As the evaluation system shifts to outcomes, gifted educators will have to be able to talk about progress in reaching desired learner outcomes. However, policymakers and educator have not yet defined desired outcomes for gifted and talented students.

If states are serious about moving into a phase of developing district capacity to meet desired outcomes, major resources will have to be invested

in helping low-performing districts or schools. Given the economic projections for revenues, increased expenditures in one area will have to be compensated for by decreased expenditures in others. Categorical programs are likely to be prime targets for expenditure reductions by legislatures and school boards.

Challenges. At present, the unstated goals of many gifted programs are to compensate for the inadequacies of general education. Others would infer that the goal of gifted programs is to produce world-class scholars. Leaders in the education of gifted and talented students must begin the process of determining a common vision of desired student outcomes.

Many will argue that common goals for gifted students are not possible given the diversity of needs and abilities within the population considered to be gifted and talented. Early efforts in the goal-setting and tracking process will probably seem inappropriate or even misguided. But goals are needed to build a constructive rationale and framework for programs.

Once some consensus is reached about expected results from gifted and talented education programs, whether provided in the regular classroom or in special settings, then educators will need to develop measures and to start tracking progress in reaching goals.

Area 3: Reforms Focusing on Governance

Reform Principle A: Parents should be partners in the education of their children.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Creating and supporting parent education programs.
- Empowering parents to be decisionmakers for schools (e.g. the Chicago School Committees)
- Empowering parents to choose the schools their child will attend (Milwaukee Vouchers and other "Choice" programs).

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Gifted and talented education programs may become more popular as districts and states adopt choice plans. It is easy to envision schools creating or expanding special options for high ability students, as well as for the gifted and talented, to entice parents to choose their school. Gifted children can be taxing on their parents, as well on their teachers. Programs designed to educate and support parents will be very useful to parents of the gifted.

Parents of gifted and talented students are generally among the more active and vocal parents in a school. As parents are given a greater advisory or decision making roles in schools, the parents of the gifted may be in a better position to become strong advocates for the most able students.

Negative Impact. The elitist image of gifted education may create problems if parents brought into the advisory and decision making circles do not understand the rationale for gifted programs. All parents want their children to have a rich and challenging education that develops each child's unique abilities. They may find it difficult to support giving an ideal education to a select few, particularly if their child is not selected.

Challenges. Educators and parents of the gifted can make a unique contribution to parent education programs. Most teachers of the gifted have an extensive collection of enrichment ideas, or a "bag of tricks" as some call them. Many of these ideas can be adapted to create home projects for parents and children to work on together.

As schools strive to bring parents into the advisory and decision-making circles, they should ensure that those parents understand the diverse needs of students. Parents, like policymakers, tend to draw from their own experiences when

making judgments about best educational practices. Educators have a responsibility to make sure that parents can truly be partners by giving them the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.

Reform Principle B: Decisions regarding the desired outcomes of the education system should be made at the state level, but decisions as to how to achieve those goals should be made by those closest to the students.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Shifting to site-based management for certain types of decisions.
- Increasing involvement of teachers in decision-making at the school level.
- Questioning the effectiveness of state and local governance structures.
- Restructuring state education agencies.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. If site-based management and the involvement of teachers in making decisions is successful, then the staffs of schools will feel responsible for the success of all their students. If school personnel within those schools have the commitment and abilities to address the needs of gifted and talented students, then one can envision that their decisions would keep the best interest of those students in mind.

Negative Impact. Many gifted and talented programs have been district-operated with minimal involvement of school administrators or faculty. District staff make final decisions regarding which children are to be placed in special gifted programs. Frequently itinerant teachers come to the school to provide the program. Occasionally the students are moved to another site to receive services. Any district gifted program which bypasses schools should realize that this approach can be perceived by the schools as absolving them of any responsibility for meeting the needs of their gifted students. Such programs will be vulnerable if decision-making is abruptly shifted to the sites.

Challenges. The boundaries which separate gifted education from general education in many schools must become less rigid. The sense of responsibility for the success of gifted students must be shared. Based on the experiences in some schools which have shifted to site-based management, gifted pull-out programs which operate in isolation from the general program will not survive. Gifted educators must work with the rest of the school's staff to determine the best options for meeting the needs of gifted students. Linking regular and gifted education was seen as a desired action in the past; such a linkage will be critical in the future.

Reform Principle C: States must insure that students in all regions of the state and in all schools receive the education guaranteed by the state constitution regardless of local fiscal resources.

Examples of Actions Being Taken:

- Increasing state control of fiscal resources for education.
- Changing school finance formulas to shift revenue bases and expenditures to achieve "standard" education for all students.

Potential Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

Positive Impact. Resource-poor districts will receive more funds once states shift funding systems to reduce the discrepancy in funding among districts. This should benefit gifted and talented students in the poorer districts, as the increase in funds may be used to purchase special programs.

Negative Impact. Many states are moving toward a set of standards that they guarantee will be

provided to all students. State finance formulas are being revised to provide a guaranteed level of funding to the districts so that they can meet the standards. The most recent court cases and state formulas are moving in the direction of the "Robin Hood" principle whereby rich districts must give their money to poor districts so that their per pupil expenditures are roughly equal.

States must define their standards to include special adaptations and extensions for the gifted and talented, or else those services will not be supported through the formulas. Furthermore, districts which formerly had the local resources to provide gifted programs, even though such programs were not required by the state, may be forced to turn their local revenues back to the state as part of funding-equalization.

Challenges. Educators of the gifted and talented in the more affluent districts must recognize the changes pushing their way through state finance formulas. It is essential that they improve advocacy efforts on behalf of gifted and talented students with state legislatures and state boards of education so that state standards require schools to address the needs of the gifted.

Traditional State Policy Issues

State policy issues in educating the gifted and talented have centered on administrative arrangements for the program, state definitions of the population, program requirements, and state finance of local programs. A brief analysis of the approaches taken by the state to these traditional issues are outlined in this section.

Issue 1: Should Gifted and Talented Education Policies Be Linked With Special Education Policies?

Education of gifted and talented children does not fit neatly into existing program categories. Many states feel that it belongs in special education. Approximately 13 states follow the same policies and procedures for the gifted as are required for the handicapped students in the state. At least 20 state education agencies place their specialists or directors of gifted programs in the special education unit. Other states believe that gifted education belongs in general curriculum or elsewhere in school improvement programs.

The advantages and disadvantages of placing gifted and talented children, along with handicapped children, under an umbrella of exceptional child education are as follows:

Advantage #1: There is consistency in program philosophy.

Gifted and talented children, like the handicapped, are a unique population who differ significantly from average children. Their needs have not been as widely recognized as those of the handicapped, but they are just as "exceptional." Thus, the principles of special education for the handicapped also apply to the gifted: highly individualized instruction and a curriculum that is adapted and extended to meet unique needs.

Advantage #2: Existing systems for delivering programs can serve both groups.

Because the precepts for services to the handicapped and gifted are the same, a single administrative structure can be used for both. This can lead to more effective use of administrative and support personnel, including school psychologists.

Advantage #3: The funding mechanisms will work well for both types of programs.

A single system for funding serves two purposes: It simplifies the state's education budget and appropriation process for gifted students, since the same type of mechanism, even if the rate or weight varies, is used for all exceptional students. In addition, it provides a reliable stream of funding

to local districts. This enables districts to invest in developing a comprehensive program for the gifted because the state commitment appears to be more stable.

Disadvantage #1: Gifted programs may have to take a back seat to handicapped programs.

Due to the federal and state requirements for services to the handicapped, state and local education agencies are frequently too busy administering programs for the handicapped to pay adequate attention to gifted education. When gifted and handicapped students have to compete for limited resources, both human and fiscal, the handicapped are more likely to get a greater share of resources.

Disadvantage #2: Many educators of the handicapped resist the notion of including the gifted in special education.

Educators, parents, and other concerned citizens fought long and hard to get free and appropriate education for all handicapped children. Many feel that there are less than adequate resources to provide quality services for the handicapped. Thus, they are very nervous about having those limited resources stretched to reach children they feel do not need special help. Also, educators and parents of the gifted and talented are not always enthusiastic about including their children in special education. They often feel that gifted and talented programs will always play "second fiddle" to services for the handicapped.

Issue 2: How Should the State Define and Demarcate the Gifted and Talented Population?

Unfortunately, there is no clear sorting point between students whom everyone would consider gifted and talented and those whom everyone would consider just "above average." Children's abilities are difficult to assess accurately, subject to spurts and lags in terms of development, and range along a continuum. A state's definition draws the line between children who will be called gifted and talented and those who will not. Those included in the defined group will receive the extra funding and programs required by state standards. The others are likely to be denied the special assistance, even if individuals in the excluded group would clearly benefit from inclusion. The defining line is arbitrary and should be recognized as such.

States have wrestled with three issues in defining the gifted and talented population:

1. Narrow or Broad Definition

The majority of states have adopted some version of the broad definition of giftedness offered by U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland in his Report to Congress in 1972. This definition recognized potential as well as demonstrated ability in six areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, visual and performing arts, leadership ability, and psychomotor abilities. Other states limited their definition to include only students with either exceptional intellectual abilities, academic abilities, or both.

The advantages of the narrow definition are as follows:

- A narrow definition will focus the available resources of the state on abilities traditionally accepted as being "school" concerns—intellectual and academic development.
- The percentage of the school population that is selected under a narrow definition is smaller, making it possible to operate quality gifted programs with less funds.
- Intellectual and academic abilities can be measured on regularly administered standardized tests, and educators feel more secure when they can use test scores to make and justify difficult placement decisions.

The broader definition also has several advantages:

- A broader definition conveys the state's intent to recognize and develop such important abilities as leadership, creativity, and artistic expression.
- Gifted children who come from culturally diverse groups may not channel their talents into the traditional academic areas. A broader definition encourages educators to see the variety of ways children can express their outstanding potential.
- A broader definition provides more flexibility to a local district in establishing gifted programs that meet its interests and needs.

2. Percentage of the Population To Be Served

States usually feel that they have to limit the population that will be eligible for services through gifted and talented programs. Policymakers know that there are limited funds, and that only a small percentage of students have abilities so exceptional that they need services beyond those provided in the regular education system.

A few states use scores from either intelligence or achievement tests to set the cut-off. Most states set a limit by stipulating a percentage of a school district's enrollment that can be included in state-funded programs. Using percentage limitations is generally preferable to letting a specific test score draw the line between gifted children and "others," because the percentage approach gives more flexibility to schools in finding gifted and talented students who might otherwise be missed by standardized tests. The percentage limitations also work best for state budget and appropriation decisions, as it provides a more predictable figure of the numbers of students eligible for special state funding.

3. Local Or National Standards For Comparison

State definitions may or may not set the standard for comparison of gifted students to local or national norms. Many directly or indirectly encourage districts to define the gifted in terms of national standards. Thus, to be identified as gifted in a district, students must have scores that place them in the top national percentages.

In many districts, the distribution of scores on ability and achievement tests will reflect national averages. In some districts, particularly those with a higher percentage of poor students, scores may be below national averages. In other districts, students will achieve above national averages.

Policies which follow a national standard define giftedness as being in the uppermost range of scores on a standardized test, as reported by the publishers of the test. The chief advantage to using a national standard for defining giftedness is common acceptability. Most people are accustomed to defining the gifted either as those who have an IQ of 130 or above on a standardized intelligence test or those who score at or above the 98th percentile on a standardized achievement test.

. The key advantage to setting policies which use local standards is flexibility. If the intelligence of the average student in a district is quite high, then the cut-off score on an intelligence test could be set even higher. If the district has a significant percentage of students who do poorly on standardized tests, then officials could set scores which help identify students who are exceptionally able given their peer group.

Using the local standard for comparison is defensible. Instruction in a regular classroom in any school across this country is generally geared for the average student in that group. The children who are significantly brighter or significantly slower are the exceptional learners, and they need special adaptations in the curriculum and instruction.

Issue 3: Should the State Mandate Services for the Gifted and Talented?

The majority of states have recognized that all districts should provide special services for the

gifted and talented and have mandated those services through state statutes or administrative code. If a state is truly committed to the success of all students, then the state should require schools and districts to address the needs of the gifted and talented. Those requirements can either be explicitly stated in law or regulations, or articulated through state standards for accreditation and approval of districts and schools.

Issue 4: How Can the State Provide Fiscal Incentives to Districts for Gifted and Talented Education Programs?

States which link gifted and talented education with special education tend to have a similar funding system for both groups. Those systems may generate funding based on special weights for exceptional students; level of services offered to "units" of children; reimbursement for a percentage of documented excess costs; or reimbursement for special education personnel.

States which separate gifted and talented education from education of handicapped students generally support special gifted programs through categorical funds. A number of states, however, have created special "funding weights" for gifted and talented students which flow to districts as part of the state general aid formula.

In states with categorical funding for gifted and talented education, the limited dollars are distributed to the districts through a number of approaches such as the following:

Competitive Grants

This approach has been commonly used by states as they initiated funding for the gifted and talented. Districts apply for grants and their applications are judged by a committee of qualified persons. Only the "best" grant applications (i.e., the best written, the most promising ideas, the agencies which propose the best approaches to addressing state priorities, etc.) are funded. Some states using this approach set a limit on the number of dollars any district can request so that more districts can be funded.

Predetermined Allocations

Some states set a dollar figure on the amount a district can receive for each identified gifted child—sometimes up to a specific limit-or for each program unit. Districts that wish to receive the allocation must apply to the state, which in turn grants them funding if state standards are met. If the state appropriation is not adequate to fund all district applications, awards are either decreased proportionally or else awarded on a competitive basis.

Important Considerations

In encouraging local districts to develop and expand programs for gifted and talented students, the stability of funding is at least as important as the amount of funding. Reliability of funding seems to be a particularly important variable if state funding is to be successful in stimulating local program development. If the state wants to communicate clearly its commitment to meeting the needs of gifted and talented children, then the state should provide stable financial support. District administrators have seen state and federal initiatives come and go. They watch any categorical program for signs of waning state interest. Districts will not invest their time and energy in creating quality programs if funds are going to disappear later. Funding should be balanced with state policies and appropriate services for gifted and talented education.

There are basically three ways that state policymakers can encourage local programs for gifted and talented students. They can adopt policies that encourage or require such programs. They can provide funding. They can provide services such as training and technical assistance.

The balancing of policies, funding, and services is crucial to systematic, statewide program growth. States have failed to create or sustain quality local programs for the gifted and talented

by having too much of one or two of the elements and not enough of the other. Examples of failed state leadership include states which have mandated, but not funded gifted programs; states which mandated and funded gifted programs but set requirements for the program that exceeded human resource capability (e.g., not enough psychologists to administer required test; not enough certified teachers); and states which failed to provide sufficient guidance on how to develop defensible programs. Funding should match the state's stage of development in terms of gifted and talented education.

Competitive grants are good to stimulate interest in the early phases of developing programs for gifted and talented children. Predetermined allocations work fine as long as the dollars available can grow with increases in numbers of students served and with improvement in quality of services. Ideally, all states should move beyond categorical funding to some type of formula funding or guaranteed reimbursement system. Imbedding additional dollars for gifted and talented education in general state aid or in special aid formulas signals the state's long-term commitment to supporting local services for the gifted and talented.

Policies either for program approval or school accreditation can ensure that districts which receive the additional dollars utilize them for gifted and talented programs.

State Policy Leadership for the 90s: Provoking the Transformation of Gifted and Talented Education

Gifted and talented education must change. State policies and actions can either encourage a transformation or continue traditional approaches which will become increasingly dysfunctional as reforms progress in regular education. A transformation in gifted and talented programs must occur in three critical areas: rationale, linkage with regular education, and addressing diversity among students.

Reconceptualizing the Rationale

Current programs for the gifted and talented are often defended with rhetoric about need but created with a philosophy of reward. Gifted and talented students do not deserve special services. Gifted and talented students have a marked difference in abilities which necessitates adaptations and extensions in the general education program. Many times these adaptations and extensions require alternative settings and specialized personnel. In short, when the differences in their learning rate and level exceed the resources of a regular classroom, gifted and talented children need special services.

Most program administrators are not aware of the pervasiveness of the overt and covert use of the reward rationale in gifted and talented education. But indicators of the reward rationale abound in programs. Outlined below are the differences in programs which have the need rationale as their philosophical base as opposed to the reward rationale.

Reward Rationale

Placement decisions are primarily based by the students attaining a set score on a norm-referenced, standardized test. There is one program. Students with the right score get to be in that program. The program has vague goals and objectives. The philosophy is that gifted students get to do whatever the teacher or students feel are suitable "gifted" activities. Students are not allowed to participate in the gifted program if their regular work is unacceptable, if they make bad grades, or if they misbehave. They must make-up any work they missed in their regular class.

Need Rationale

Placement decisions truly utilize and weigh a variety of data which compare the students to their peers in a particular school. Schools and districts examine the needs of students and strive to create a variety of arrangements, provisions, and formal

programs to address them. While individual differences and needs are addressed, the district has overall goals for educating its gifted students. These goals systematically guide teachers in planning learning experiences for their gifted students. When gifted and talented students are to receive instruction in special settings, the regular teacher understands how that instruction relates to the regular class work. Schools view slumping grades or misbehavior as possible indicators that the student needs more intensive help.

If programs are to address needs and not just reward accomplishment, then program leaders must invest more time in evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts. Evaluation requires knowing what you intended to accomplish in the first place. Thus an essential first step in ensuring a transformation of gifted and talented education is determining the desired outcomes for students. Programs are then centered around helping students achieve these outcomes through a curriculum and instructional strategies adapted and extended according to their strengths and needs. A continuous cycle of reflection, renewal, and revision ensures that every effort is made to match the program with the unique capabilities of gifted and talented students.

Linking With Regular Education

In reflecting on the development of the current education system, one could conclude that the first signs that restructuring needed to take place occurred decades ago when schools began to create a second system of special programs for the disadvantaged, handicapped, limited-English proficient, and the gifted and talented. In some districts, the profound structural inadequacies of the system are evidenced by the high percentage of students who must receive special services because their needs are not addressed by the primary system. When close to a majority of a district's students receive services through the second system, it is clear that the solution lies with changing the primary system, not with proliferating additional programs.

Most observers and leaders of the education system agree that fundamental changes, or restructuring, must take place. Schools must be designed to be caring, learning environments that help each and every child successfully accomplish the high goals we must set. As changes in the primary system occurs, proponents of second system programs must also change.

The inadequacies of most gifted and talented programs have been a source of concern to advocates for many years. We know that the 2 to 3 hours a week of "enrichment" which most special gifted education programs provide cannot begin to address fully the needs of gifted students. Such meager dosages of appropriate instruction are like insulin to the diabetic. The insulin does not cure the disease, it just keeps the person from going into a coma. Thus, advocates for gifted and talented education should welcome and support changes in the primary system of education. Existing models were just one type of means for meeting the educational needs of gifted and talented students. Now, educators of the gifted and talented should shift their commitment for discrete programs to commitment to ensuring that the goals of those programs are achieved.

State leadership is needed to encourage general educators to utilize the talents of specialists in creating classrooms that are capable of addressing diversity. Specialists in gifted education have often discussed the need to work with general educators. Creating a linkage with general education is no longer an ideal; it is an essential activity.

Creating a shared system of responsibility between specialists and general educators should become the goal of all state policies, funding mechanisms, training and technical assistance services, as well as of all administrative decisions. State education agencies should examine their organizational structures to see how they could model shared responsibility. State decision-makers should examine all aspects of statutory and regulatory requirements; funding mechanisms; application forms for grants; the questions asked by the state

as a part of local program approval; guidelines provided in resource documents; and various oral and written communications from agency staff. All of these state leadership tools should be designed to help, not hinder, local efforts to create the schools we seek for all students, including the gifted and talented.

Districts which operate gifted and talented programs from the central office so that they by-pass general educators and administrators should redesign their delivery systems. Schools which do not view education of the gifted and talented as a shared responsibility should bring the faculty together to find ways to cooperate. The state can encourage and support the districts and schools to transform their thinking about total system responses to the needs of gifted and talented children.

Addressing Diversity

State leadership tools must be used to push districts beyond the "one size fits all" gifted program. Flexibility in identification and services are essential because of uneven profiles of ability and non-traditional expression of ability. State standards must not encourage, directly or indirectly, narrow concepts of giftedness. If the state is concerned about funding and feels that narrow definitions and rigid identification are needed to create caps on expenditures, then they should think again.

States should, instead, talk about a "state share" of a comprehensive gifted education program and determine the state's contribution in terms of the percentage of students served or the percentage of expenditures on gifted programming. The same leadership tools that can build linkages between regular and special education can address statutory and regulatory requirements, funding mechanisms, application forms for grants, the questions asked by the state as a part of local program approval, guidelines provided in resource documents, and various oral and written communications from agency staff. State policies and practices should strongly encourage schools to seek exceptional potential among all populations and to recognize that the potential of diverse students may be exhibited in non-academic work.

A key lever in changing the education system's views on the value of diversity may well rest with identification requirements of gifted and talented programs. If grades, teacher approval, and standardized test scores are used to find the most able, then the message is that success in school is an end unto itself. Outstanding potential needs to be developed in students not to ensure a sufficient supply of valedictorians but because the fulfillment of that potential in adulthood is essential for our national survival.

A Checklist for States

States vary in capacity to lead a transformation of programs at the district and school level. Some states have a sufficient reform infrastructure in place to support the fundamental changes needed in gifted and talented education. States that are in earlier stages of reform should strive to bring gifted and talented education into their deliberations now so that changes in the primary system will also address needed changes in education of the most able.

Outlined below are some questions states can use as a framework for their own actions in guiding the transformation.

- Are we ready to provide state leadership in transforming gifted and talented education?
- Have we educated ourselves about the issues in school reform across the nation and in our own state?
- Have we helped educate others such as parents, students, educators, and school board members as well as leaders from government, business, and the general community so that they can be part of the dialogue about transforming gifted and talented education?
- Is our department organized so that the talents of a variety of agency leaders can be utilized

in providing state leadership to transform gifted and talented education?

- Have we provided a clear vision of state goals?
- Have we clearly stated what we expect gifted and talented students to know and be able to do?
- Do we have written documents that provide guidance on gifted and talented education and how it should interface with general education?
- Do our state goals for all of education and our state curricular frameworks include specific language which articulate how the goals and framework are to be extended or adapted for gifted and talented students?
- Have we clearly stated what we expect of schools in terms of providing caring learning environments that address diverse strengths and needs, including the strengths and needs of gifted and talented students?
- Have we clearly stated what we expect of schools in terms of collaborating with parents, the community, and other private and public institutions in order to address the strengths and needs of all children, including gifted and talented students?
- Are our policies regarding special populations consistent with our state goals? Do our policies encourage the perpetuation of distinct systems or encourage the creation of schools that address diverse strengths and needs?
- Do our policies and standards promote a sense of shared responsibility with each part of the system striving to achieve success for all students, including the gifted and talented?
- Do our policies and standards inadvertently encourage preset standards for achievement which restrain the most able and brand the less able as being defective?
- Do we provide conferences and workshops for parents and educators who have a special interest in the gifted and talented, and also provide workshops and presentations at general education conferences on educating the gifted and talented?
- Do our state funding mechanisms promote shared responsibility and comprehensive approaches for addressing the strengths and needs of gifted and talented education?
- Do we have an effective system for accountability?
- Do we provide guidance to districts on (1) assessing the progress of gifted and talented students; (2) assessing the capability of schools to address the needs of gifted and talented students; and (3) assessing the competence of professionals to address the needs of gifted and talented students.
- Do our state's general education policies and practices regarding the assessment of students, schools, and professional personnel include indicators of success related to gifted and talented students?
- Do our state, district, and school reports on progress in education show progress made or not made in reaching desired outcomes for gifted and talented students?
- Do we conduct regular, on-site reviews of state-funded programs designed to serve gifted and talented students?
- Do we conduct regular, on-site reviews of schools as part of the state's accreditation and approval process, and during those reviews do we evaluate the schools' adaptations and extensions for gifted and talented students?
- Does our state provide rewards and sanctions (e.g. special grants, special recognition, program approval, special accreditation ratings) for gifted and talented programs based on outcomes for gifted and talented students?
- Do we judge the success of districts and schools based on progress in achieving desired outcomes in students, including achiev-

ing desired outcomes in gifted and talented students?

- Does our state system of rewards and sanctions align with progress made in achieving desired outcomes in students, including achieving desired outcomes in gifted and talented students?
- Do we help schools and districts develop and improve their education assessment systems, including assessment of services to gifted and talented students?
- Do the results of our assessments at the district and school level inform state decisions, policy revisions, and resource allocations so that we ensure that all schools and districts can help all students, including the gifted and talented, achieve desired outcomes?

Recommendations for Federal Leadership

Federal leadership should focus on helping states and districts provoke a transformation in programs. The Office of Education Research and Improvement, other offices in the U.S. Department of Education, federal agencies which set and monitor compliance with federal administrative policies, and Congress can help or hinder school- and classroom-level efforts to address diverse needs and strengths of students.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the report it plans to issue next year, and its ongoing programs can make a difference in guiding states to a vision of a total education system which will help gifted and talented students. Some of the actions OERI can take are outlined below.

Report

The National Report on Gifted and Talented Education should serve as an advocacy document that will help everyone, from top level officials to school-site reformers, to recognize the need for restructuring to address the strengths and needs of all students, including the gifted and talented.

There should be strongly worded statements regarding the desire and need for educators of the gifted and talented to be brought into the discussions on reform. They have much they can contribute in terms of experience with curriculum and instruction that challenge students to use their minds well.

The report should be taken to national meetings and talked about in speeches by OERI leaders. OERI can play a critical role in reminding everyone in the system that success for all students means *all* students. Our concern for the less able does not have to displace our concern for the most able.

Research Center

All researchers receiving funding from OERI should be encouraged to consider gifted and talented students, as is appropriate, in conducting research on various aspects of education reform and school improvement.

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented should be encouraged to focus its research on how education reform and school improvement efforts can be shaped to address the strengths and needs of gifted and talented students.

Training

OERI should sponsor more meetings, like the ones held for state directors of programs for the gifted, that encourages leaders in gifted and talented education to explore strategies for transforming programs. OERI should sponsor meetings of general educators and reform leaders to encourage them to explore strategies for addressing the strengths and needs of gifted and talented students in the context of their reform and improvement efforts.